

# “The *New* American Soldier”: Patricia Highsmith and the “American” Abroad

Discussions of Patricia Highsmith’s representation of American identity and values have largely eluded critical attention, which has tended to prioritise her idiosyncratic representation of criminality. Highsmith, however, was a writer fundamentally concerned with America, and this concern is especially evident in her writings set outside of the United States. Throughout the 1960s, Highsmith moved her fiction out of small, suburban American towns and across the Atlantic. Novels such as *The Two Faces of January* (1964), *Those Who Walk Away* (1967), and *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969) all feature American protagonists displaced in European and North African settings. Current scholarship has yet to address the significance of this change of setting on Highsmith’s representation of “America”, and, more specifically, the “American” figure. Previous readings of these novels have focussed on broader political concerns such as the neo-colonial relationship of Westerners to non-Western cultures, as well as the apparent clash of moral and political beliefs emerging from this dynamic. This paper, however, argues that Highsmith’s displacement of Americans in “foreign” (or non-American) settings represents a sustained critique of “America” and the “American” figure as ideological constructions.

Concentrating predominantly on *The Tremor of Forgery*, I will show how Highsmith employs her characteristic technique of deploying contrasting male protagonists to present competing ideas of America. The discussion will reframe the novel’s interest in the dynamics of America’s overseas politics, arguing that the contrasting attitudes of its characters draw attention to prominent contradictions in the prevailing ideologies of the archetypal “American” figure, such as a libertarian individualism combined with a conformist politics. Furthermore, the paper contends that Highsmith’s displacement of American characters in non-American settings intensifies the focus on everyday “American” practices, such as window-shopping, and the “American” products consumed by her characters, notably Coca-Cola. In doing so, Highsmith satirizes what she perceives as dominant American attitudes towards class, race and consumerism.

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